DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 458 CE 051 132

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TITLE	Trends and Directions in Career Education. ERIC Digest No. 79.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, Ohio.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	88
CONTRACT	RI88062005
NOTE	4p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Career Education; *Educational Change; *Educational Needs; Educational Objectives; *Educational Trends; Futures (of Society); Postsecondary Education; *Program Content; *Program Improvement; Relevance (Education); School Business Relationship; School Community Relationship; Secondary Education
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

The repeal of the Career Education Incentive Act of 1977 in 1981 and a number of societal changes in the last decade have altered the context of career education. Rapid changes in information and technology, changing family patterns, structural changes in the economy and labor market, and the trend toward lifelong education are all factors that have had a significant impact on the objectives and delivery of career education. The following areas merit special attention by educational planners and career educators alike: private sector/education partnerships; general employability needs; career awareness, exploration, and decision making; career infusion and educational reform; work as a meaningful part of the total life-style, the education-work relationship and career choice, and equity and career choice. Key issues that may shape the future of career education are the extent to which career education will (1) focus on employment as opposed to employability, (2) enhance partnerships between the educational system and the community, (3) serve as an effective educational reform movement, and (4) continue to be guided by and have the support of state and local leadership. (MN)

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TRENDS AND DIRECTIONS IN CAREER EDUCATION

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

1988

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

TRENDS AND DIRECTIONS IN CAREER EDUCATION

Career education began to develop dramatically in the 1950s when the traditional occupational choice emphasis of career education began to be replaced by a broader focus on individuals and their career development over the course of their lives. The focal point of career education expanded in the 1960s when career development came to be viewed as an aggregate of psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic, and other factors. The scope of career education became broader still in the 1970s when the concept of a career began to be understood in terms of possible personal choices related to the total life-style of an individual (Gysbers 1984).

At the time of the passage of the Career Education Incentive Act in 1977, career education was seen as a means of "relating the occupational aspects of human development to all levels of learning" and of relating leisure, sex, family, and community roles to one's commitment to work (Herr 1987, p. 21). The repeal of the act in 1981 and a number of societal changes in the last decade have altered the context of career education. This ***ERIC Digest*** examines trends in the field of career education since the beginning of the 1980s and raises some key issues that may determine its future.

Trends in Career Education in the 1980s

Hansen (1987) discusses some societal changes that affect the context in which career education operates. Rapid changes in information and technology are not only revolutionizing the workplace and occupations, but are also altering the way in which career information is acquired and career guidance is practiced. Changing family patterns, such as dual-career and single-parent families, signal the evolution of new relationships between family and work that will affect individual career choices and patterns.

The "humanizing" of the workplace implies that career education must continue to emphasize the individual needs of workers. At the same time, structural changes in the economy resulting in layoffs and firings reinforce the importance of educating people about changing careers and about looking at work as one among many possible sources of life satisfaction. The lifelong learning movement and the trend toward lifelong career development point to the need for instilling lifelong attitudes about learning early in the educational process.

Other trends in career education were identified in Hoyt's (1987a) surveys of the National Career Education Leaders' Communication Network. The following components of career education give an indication of its past, present, and future (Hoyt 1987b).

Private Sector/Education Partnerships

From the outset, career education has been defined in terms of a partnership between public education and the community. Public sector-private sector partnerships are a popular concept with many promising models. However, better definitions and measures of effectiveness could be developed (Page 1987). More also needs to be done in terms of better connections between the concepts of partnerships and educational reform and of improved awareness of the potential of the partnership concept as a tool for educational reform.

General Employability Skills

Although opinions vary as to exactly what constitutes employability, general employability skills have been deemed an important part of career education since the U.S. Office of Education's (USOE) first official policy paper on career education. Employability skills have gained popularity with the growing recognition of the fact that people will increasingly be forced to change occupations during their adult lives. What is needed now is consensus on defining employability skills and on deciding how and where they will be taught.

Career Awareness, Exploration, and Decision Making

As occupations change and the relationship between education and work is transformed, the importance of career education as a vehicle for helping persons achieve greater career awareness and master decision-making skills is being recognized. Support for career awareness and career guidance has been particularly evident in the recent educational reform proposals.

Career Infusion and Educational Reform

First used in the 1970s, the concept of infusing career education in classrooms has been enthusiastically received in the 1980s. Many outstanding materials for use in infusing career instruction in vocational and academic classrooms have been produced. Hoyt (1987b) feels that process-oriented approaches are necessary for lasting educational reform; career education is a thoroughly tested and validated process-oriented approach.

Work as a Meaningful Part of the Total Life-style

The following steps are especially important if career educators are to succeed in making work a meaningful part of the total life-style:

- Shifting the focus of instruction in work values away from factors enhancing worker satisfaction to "employment productivity indicators"
- Recognizing the human need to work and helping students discover ways of meeting this need in other life roles
- Recognizing the need to retain the concept of the work ethic and applying it in conjunction with an emphasis on work values
- Taking advantage of the expertise being accumulated regarding the quality of working life movement

The Education-Work Relationship and Individual Choice

The need for students to see a more meaningful relationship between school and work was listed by USOE as 1 of the 11 conditions dictating a need for educational reform. This need was also highly ranked by the National Career Education

Leaders' Communication Network. Materials designed to enhance this relationship (such as computerized career guidance systems) are increasing in quality and quantity. However, the goal of education as preparation for work should be kept in perspective as one of several basic goals of education.

Equity and Career Choice

The need to protect the interests and freedom of career choice of women, minorities, disabled, and disadvantaged persons has been addressed in federal legislation since the 1970s. However, Hansen (1987) describes changing attitudes toward social justice issues as evidence that bias and stereotyping still exist. She stresses that career educators should continue to fulfill an advocacy role. On the other hand, some state legislation and other laws such as the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act contain efforts to improve equity for these groups.

Issues Affecting the Future of Career Education

Based on an analysis of the main trends in career education, Hoyt (1987b) identifies some key issues that may shape the future of career education.

To what extent will the focus of career education be on employment as opposed to employability? Since the early 1980s, the view has existed that keeping the focus of career education on employability will result in the greatest long-term benefits. This appears to be what is in fact happening; for example, training programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor (including Job Training Partnership Act programs) are focusing more on helping clients develop employability skills rather than on creating jobs.

To what extent can career education enhance partnerships between the educational system and the community? The wide acceptance of the concept of public-private partnerships to improve education enables a shift in focus from creating more partnerships to creating more meaningful partnerships. The first step is to make the business community and the community at large understand that the problems facing schools are not the exclusive concern of the educational system but that they are in fact everyone's problems.

To what extent will career education be effective as an educational reform movement? One of the greatest challenges facing career educators today is persuading other educators of the value of career education as a proven process-oriented approach to educational improvement.

To what extent will state and local leadership for career education continue to exist? State departments of education and local school systems employ fewer career education coordinators than they did in 1982. However, a relatively large number of persons charged with coordinating career education still remain, even though their job title may have changed. Other encouraging trends include the fact that there continue to be over 400 persons in the National Career Education Leaders' Communication Network each year, their opinions regarding the "health" of career education have remained fairly stable over the past 5 years, and state and local career associations are increasing in both number and strength.

Hansen (1987) presents some other ideas for shaping the future of career education:

- Systematic career/life planning programs in schools and colleges
- Increased emphasis on the linkage between work, family, education, and leisure
- Reaffirmation of the democratic goals of maximizing human potential
- More emphasis on entrepreneurship and creation of one's own career
- Better training in planning and management of change

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This ***ERIC Digest*** was developed in 1988 by Michele Naylor, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under Contract No. RI88062005. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.

ERIC is sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education

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